

EVALUATION

After the activity is over, you will want to know whether or not you met the needs you identified at the outset and if you achieved the learning objectives. You may also want to know how you can improve your next activity, and what unmet needs still exists. Evaluation can also be used to assess the quality of the teaching and the participants' perception of their enhanced professional effectiveness. The ideal evaluation would examine whether or not patient care or patient outcomes are favorably affected by continuing education.

Evaluation ranges from the simplest, the so-called "satisfaction index" about how well the participants liked the course (the so-called "satisfaction index"), to the most complex assessment of how patient care or health status changed as a result of provider participation in the educational activity. It is impossible to evaluate all aspects of an activity; therefore, at the outset, you will need to decide just what it is you will want to know at the end of your evaluation effort. Rather than choosing a tool and finding out after your meeting what you learned from it, decide in the beginning what you want to learn and then select or design a tool accordingly. The following is one example of an evaluation tool you may use. We can help you design your own evaluation tool or modify one you have seen elsewhere.

While asking participants to complete questionnaires after an activity is the most common way used to collect data, there are other methods. Keep in mind that the amount of data collected must be manageable, and that someone has to tabulate and analyze it. Evaluation should not be a routine exercise that is done to "meet the requirements." If you feel that you are not accomplishing anything useful with your evaluations, then it is time for us to help you find a better way to do it.

OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Here are some ideas to help you develop and document your evaluation process. The steps listed are followed by examples or explanations, but you are encouraged to tailor the process to your own needs. All of this should be the responsibility of the planning committee, not one individual.

Step 1: Write down several goals for your evaluation process.

Examples of Goals:

- Determine future topic needs
- Find out how to improve future CE activities
- See if the speakers are worth asking back
- Find out if the objectives were accomplished
- Find out if the topics were well chosen
- See if participants feel a sense of enhanced professional effectiveness
- Learn if health care providers' behavior is changed by the activity
- Determine if patient outcomes are affected by the course

Step 2: Decide how much data you are able to collect and who is going to analyze it. Don't plan to collect more data than you are able to handle. You can't analyze all things for all activities and do it well, so decide what's important.

Step 3: Decide what data to collect and how to collect it. Questionnaires completed by participants are the common method, but there are other ways.

Step 4: Design a suitable collection tool or method to obtain the data (or you may ask the Clinical Support Center for examples that meet your needs.)

Step 5: Collect the data.

Step 6: Tabulate the data.

Step 7: Write your findings based on an analyses of the data. Some typical evaluation questions may include: What was good? What was bad? Were the objectives achieved? How would you change it next time?

Step 8: Critique your evaluation process itself. Was it done well? Did it provide useful information? How would you do it differently next time?

In summary, the following items should be considered:

_____ The planning committee will consider what it wants to learn from the evaluation process.

_____ An appropriate method will be chosen to collect data to answer those questions.

_____ At a minimum, evaluation assesses the quality of instruction, the achievement of the objectives, and the perception of enhanced effectiveness.

_____ The plan will include the means to tabulate and analyze the data. The planning committee will examine the data and send a concise written report to the Clinical Support Center summarizing its conclusions, including the strengths and weaknesses of the activity and plans to improve continuing education activities in the future.